

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release
November 2, 2005

Contact: Robert White / Drew Crockett
(202) 225-5074

HHS Secretary Leavitt to Testify About Government's New Pandemic Influenza Plan

*Prepping for Avian Flu or Other Pandemic Outbreak,
Bush Administration Has Proposed \$7.1 Billion Readiness Plan*

**What: Government Reform Committee Hearing:
"The National Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response Plan: Is
the U.S. Ready for Avian Flu?"**

When: FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4TH at 10:00 A.M.

Where: ROOM 2154, RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

Background:

The Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918-1919 caused an estimated 40-50 million deaths worldwide, and some scientists predict that the next flu pandemic will be just as severe, and may occur within the next five years. **Experts have projected that more than half a million Americans could die, and over two million could be hospitalized in the event of a U.S. pandemic flu outbreak.**

While there is no certainty regarding what will cause the next flu pandemic, many experts point to avian flu as a likely culprit. The World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other public health organizations have been conducting surveillance in Asia where an avian flu strain, H5N1 is circulating, and to date has infected and killed more than 62 people in Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Indonesia. The flu strain is extremely virulent, and most humans lack immunity.

Asia's problem with avian flu could soon become the world's. As was illustrated by the SARS crisis of 2003, avian flu could spread across the globe as quickly as one can fly from Hanoi to Washington, D.C.

This week, President Bush unveiled the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza, which stresses preparedness and communication, surveillance and detection, and response and containment as the key strategies for combating the spread of pandemic flu. The President requested \$7.1 billion in emergency funding to implement the National Strategy, including: \$2.8 billion to accelerate cell culture technology and improve the manufacturing process of vaccines; \$1.5 billion to purchase and stockpile the H5N1 vaccine currently in clinical trials; \$1 billion to stockpile anti-viral drugs to treat first responders and vulnerable populations; and \$250 million to detect and contain outbreaks before they spread around the world.

The President also urged Congress to tackle the issue of liability protection for vaccine manufactures – many of whom cite the costs of lawsuits as one of the factors deterring production of vaccines. Unlike many pharmaceuticals, vaccines do not generate huge profits.

This hearing presents the first opportunity for the nation's lead public health official, Secretary Michael O. Leavitt of the Department of Health and Human Services, to explain to Congress, and answer questions about, the details of the President's plan.

Witness: The Honorable Michael O. Leavitt, Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services